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ABSTRACT

There is a growing need for program evaluation in the human services field. Along with this is a need to assess environments in order to plan effective programs. Graduate programs are doing little to prepare students for this task. Instead of training students how to do evaluation, graduate programs stubbornly adhere to the experimental research-scientist model. Research generates further research with little effect upon clinical practice. An alternate training paradigm based on the scientist-practitioner model is necessary. If evaluators are to be successful, they need a knowledge in program evaluation, environmental assessment, political processes, organizational theory, and research design. Evaluators also need interpersonal skills. Will graduate training meet the challenge of the 70's and train students in program evaluation and environmental assessment? (Author)

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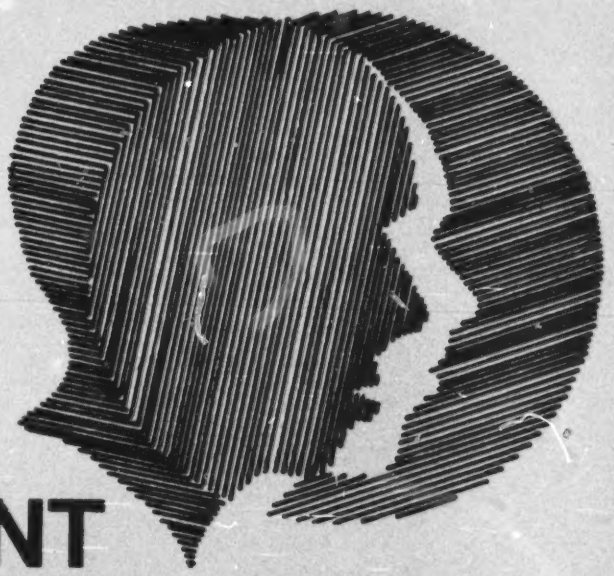

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The cover depicts man's striving toward unity of personality, represented by the magic circle, or mandala.

TRAINING IN NONTRADITIONAL RESEARCH*

By

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Student Development Staff Papers
Vol. VI, No. 1, 1975-76

Abstract

There is a growing need for program evaluation in the human services field. Along with this is a need to assess environments in order to plan effective programs. Graduate programs are doing little to prepare students for this task. Instead of training students how to do evaluation, graduate programs stubbornly adhere to the experimental research-scientist model. Research generates further research with little effect upon clinical practice. An alternate training paradigm based on the scientist-practitioner model is necessary. If evaluators are to be successful, they need a knowledge in program evaluation, environmental assessment, political processes, organizational theory, and research design. Evaluators also need interpersonal skills. Will graduate training programs meet the challenge of the 70's and train students in program evaluation and environmental assessment?

*Paper delivered at APA, Chicago, August, 1975.

Training in Nontraditional Research

Can today's graduate students rise to the challenge of the seventies? If they do it, it won't be a result of their training. One new frontier confronting psychologists of the seventies is environmental assessment, planning, and evaluation. "Increasing numbers of investigators are working vigorously on methods of measurement and analysis in evaluation ... Probably no other change is being stressed so strongly now in the human field ... Ready or not, evaluation is moving up front (Davis, 1972, p. 3)." "In addition, it must be recognized that evaluative research requires special skills -- that it is not simply the application of laboratory research to the field -- and begin training evaluative specialists to meet the needs of action programs (Octting and Hawkes, 1974, p. 436)." Few graduate programs prepare students for this task.

The days of abundant monies and rapid proliferation of programs has been left behind with the drive for social programming in the sixties. Gone too is the power, influence, and freedom that came with money. The press to be accountable is now essential rather than gratuitous. If programs and psychologists whose livelihood depend on them are to survive, both must demonstrate their effectiveness. This is a more difficult task than it first appears. In a recent article, Campbell claimed that "99 percent of our ameliorative programs have not been evaluated in an interpretable way (Salasin, 1973, p. 7)." Evaluators are ill equipped. They lack the tools and techniques to confront the problems of social action research. With present evaluation data, it is difficult to assess program effectiveness. Campbell admonishes the methodologists "to get down out of their ivory towers and produce practical how-to-do-it instruction (Salasin, 1973, p. 7)." The trainers of our evaluators, the graduate training programs, are implicitly indicted.

What are graduate training programs doing to prepare psychology's future leaders? In many instances they are extinguishing a desire to do research.

Statistics have become master of the psychologist (Signorelli, 1974); problems have become subordinate to methodology. "The insidious effects of this trend are tellingly illustrated by the typical graduate student who is often more interested in the details of a factorial design than in the problems he gets out to study; worse, the selection of the problem is dictated by the experimental design (Bergin and Strupp, 1970, p. 25)." Goldman (1973) complains that our field is plagued by the false gods of pure research and bloodless writing. He suggests graduate schools and dissertation committees have much to answer for.

Graduate training programs stubbornly adhere to the experimental research-scientist model of training even though reports indicate it extinguishes creativity and research potential rather than fostering it (Strupp, 1974). For instance, more than 50 percent of graduate Ph.D.'s will do only one major piece of research, their dissertation (Proshansky, 1972). Proshansky (1972) states that the doctoral research produced in this model is usually not very good or significant and relegated to the bottom shelf. As a result, a small percentage (10%) of Division 12 psychologists, for example, produce most (56%) of the research (Wake and Harris, 1970). Given consequences such as these, Proshansky argues that "as long as our young colleagues cling to the experimental research scientist self-conception ... they are not likely to excell in any professional roles they perform (1972, p. 209)."

If this isn't enough, Raush (1974) also indicts the formal research training model. While there is no dearth of research publication, the consumers of research literature seem to be other researchers. Research generates further research, and the clinician does not contribute his or her firsthand experiences and leadership for studying basic human processes. Furthermore, the clinician, because of the rejection of the research model, practice new and divergent theories without supporting evidence of their validity (Bergin and Strupp, 1970). With this hiatus between research and practice, practicing psychologists lack

much useful information which they might otherwise employ in their work. "The fact is that to date research has exerted little influence on clinical practice, and the clinical work of the therapist has generally not been informed, much less altered by empirical research results (Bergin and Strupp, 1970, p. 22)."

What do we have then? On one hand there is a strong need for research that has as its focus program evaluation. A knowledge of environmental assessment is also necessary if program implementation is to be most effective. These tasks are separate specialties which require rather unique skills. This research is necessary to help the service providers make their interventions more effective. There is a need for specialized researchers with the expertise to accomplish these tasks. On the other hand, graduate programs seem reluctant to take leadership in implementing an applied scientist-practitioner model for their training in research (Pasework, et al., 1973; Proshansky, 1972; Raush, 1974; Wolff, 1972). They seem intent on preserving the experimental research-scientist model with its corresponding research dissertation as a sine qua non (Proshansky, 1972).

Society needs environmental assessment, planning and evaluation for its social action programs. Many have spoken of this need but few have responded. It is time for our graduate training programs to begin the task of developing the art and offering training for these vital areas. We must recognize that this focus of research is highly specialized and requires skills many researchers do not currently possess (May, 1974; Oetting and Hawkes, 1974). It is important that leaders in our programs acknowledge this unique need and begin the development and implementation of a new paradigm for training based on the tenets of a more applied scientist-practitioner model. The model can provide the focus through which the scientist and practitioner come closer, enabling both to work together in a mutually collaborative fashion.

The idea is not a new one. It has been suggested by others. Broskowski and Shulberg (1974; Broskowski, 1971) have suggested a Research and Development

Model. The R & D person could interface the basic sciences and applied fields by training "Ph.D.-level psychologists to systematically 'conduct' and utilize relevant research for the 'development' of procedures and techniques to help solve or prevent various clinical problems in individuals, groups, and institutions (Broskowski, 1971, p. 236)." Wolff (1972) has referred to it as the 'Clinician-Researcher' who could help surmount the chasm between science with emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual. Although Oetting (1974), Proshansky (1972), and Raush (1974) don't coin a specific title, each agrees that it is time for a change to alternative training models.

What are the qualifications of the new pioneers if they are to succeed confronting the tasks of the 70's?

(1) The primary prerequisite is an understanding of environmental assessment and program evaluation. It seems essential to understand that programs are valuable only insofar as they serve people, and not because they are good ideas of program developers. It also seems important to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific interventions. In order to accomplish these tasks, conceptual models of environmental assessment and program evaluation are imperative.

(2) The evaluator is required to have a knowledge of political processes. Program evaluation is used in decision making; it is naive to think otherwise. In order to enhance the use of evaluation data the evaluator needs to understand very complex political processes. This learning can be provided in the context of a program evaluation practicum in which the trainee can test and see the consequences of program evaluation. "The assumption (underlying Program Evaluation) is that by providing the facts, evaluation assists decision-makers to make wise choices among future courses of action. Careful and unbiased data on the consequences of programs should improve decision-making. But evaluation is a rational enterprise that takes place in a political context (Weiss, 1973, p.37),"

(3) The evaluator would be well prepared if he or she had a knowledge of organization or systems theory. This, coupled with consultation and change theory, will facilitate the constructive use of evaluation data.

(4) In addition to cognitive preparation, evaluators will be more able if they have certain personal qualities (Boskowski and Schulberg, 1974; Oetting, 1974). First, and perhaps most crucial, the evaluator needs a tolerance for ambiguity to work with the various individuals and groups that assist in the task of measuring the effectiveness of their work. Secondly, the evaluator needs to be mature with adequate communication and social skills enabling them to work constructively with people. It may be important to consider selection criteria similar to candidates for clinical work since success of the evaluator will depend in great part, but not only, on interpersonal skills.

(5) Oetting (1974) adds that a solid knowledge of research design, instrument construction, unobtrusive measures and skill in selecting and assessing behavioral outcomes are also important.

In addition to the development of new training paradigm, the graduate programs have their responsibilities. They must be flexible enough to accept more clinically oriented theses and dissertations. The training programs will help with the development of more applied scientist-practitioner programs if they also reward their staff for their non-traditional research endeavors. "It's been this narcissism of pure theory and the reward structure within the academic community that have produced reluctance. Perhaps to have university departments focused on applied social science or to have institutes for evaluative research that have their own promotion requirements would relieve these pressures (Salasin, 1973, p. 7)." This will provide modeling and incentives for faculty and students who are inclined to strike out on new paths but need some support.

In summary then, one challenge for psychologists in the seventies lies with the area of program evaluation and environmental assessment. In many aspects, it is a challenge to the flexibility and adaptability of graduate training programs. It dares them to train psychologists who will "study problems people really worry about rather than only problems formulated on the basis of reading the professional journals (Flint, 1972)." It is everyone's challenge: student, faculty, researcher, clinician. Hopefully, this impetus will free a creative potential that will lead to the enrichment of individual's lives.

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